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ART. IX. — *Sermons preached in the Chapel of Harvard College.* By JAMES WALKER, D. D. Boston : Ticknor and Fields. 1861. 12mo. pp. 397.

WE sometimes encounter in persons of strong religious sensibilities an indifference to preaching, which, so far as it reaches, tends to justify itself by discouraging careful and diligent preparation for the pulpit. This indifference often assumes — and we doubt not sincerely — a highly devotional aspect. It is frequently asserted, as a proposition which in order to be received needs only to be stated, that the legitimate purpose of a religious assembly is not the listening to instruction, but the collective offering of praise and prayer ; and at the same time it is taken for granted that the supreme importance attached in some quarters to the sermon indicates a very low type of spirituality. We are disposed to join issue with those who occupy this ground, and to deny that in a just scale of values worship takes precedence of preaching.

Were we to try the issue by the plenary authority of the New Testament, the verdict would unquestionably be on our side. It was for the purpose of preaching that the Founder of our religion ordained his twelve apostles and his seventy disciples, and this office occupies the chief place in his parting charge. Throughout the Acts of the Apostles we read constantly of preaching, while there is only the most cursory reference to any social expression of faith and piety. The apostolic Epistles recognize preaching as the one instrumentality of Divine appointment and of paramount efficacy for the salvation of men and the growth of the Church. In St. Paul's charges to Timothy and Titus, rules are given for their preaching, but none for their conducting the worship of a Christian assembly. In fine, he who should approach the inquiry without preconceived opinions could not fail of the conclusion, that, in the esteem of the sacred writers, the setting forth of the facts, truths, and promises of the Gospel was the chief office of the Christian minister and the chief purpose for which an assembly was to be convened, and that all else occupied at best only a secondary and auxiliary place.

We should reach the same result by an analysis of the several parts of the public service. Preaching is the only part that really demands a peculiar order of office-bearers in the Church, or presupposes a gathering larger than a single household. Prayer and praise are individual acts, and are intimate and fervent in the precise degree in which the individual can isolate himself, and be conscious of no presence but that of the Omnipresent. Every devout soul has its petitions and thanksgivings which the voice of another cannot offer, its conflicts, doubts, and fears, in which it must "tread the wine-press alone." Next, in point of interest, solemnity, and fervor, to secret prayer, come the services of domestic worship, in which a close community of experiences and of interests may render the devotional words uttered by one member of the family the approximate, though never the adequate, expression of what all feel, or ought to feel. But in the public assembly, the salient points of individual experience, which often most need to be upborne in entreaty or in gratitude to the soul's Author and Father, must be precluded and ignored; the worshipper cannot individualize himself, and must frequently find the very themes which press with the most anxious weight upon his own thoughts wholly unrecognized. And even were public devotion all that heart could wish, it needs not a separate profession in order to its edifying performance. If it flow from the heart and in the words of him who conducts it, there are in every congregation persons as pure as the minister in life and character, and therefore as unlikely as he to degrade the service by unworthy associations with its leader, and not unfrequently there are parishioners whose devotional utterance is more free, glowing, and edifying than their pastor's. Or if forms of prayer be used, they may be read as reverently and as acceptably by a layman as by a clergyman.

Preaching, on the other hand, demands the assembly. It is not perfect, except a goodly company be convened. The aggregate of individual receptivity and edification is in proportion to the number of worshippers. It is intrinsically a social, a public exercise. It requires, too, a separate order of men for its adequate and profitable performance. It demands intellectual discipline and preparation, close study of the Scriptures,

logical acumen, and rhetorical skill ; and it needs, for the religious criticism of life, that the critic stand somewhat aside from the arena of business and conflict, where he can take clearer views and present more impartial estimates of the ordinary objects and modes of human endeavor and activity than if he were himself involved in the *mêlée*, and drawn with the multitude in the chase.

Preaching also has a more universal adaptation than worship. In the latter only the devout join ; while the former is addressed to all, and especially to those who bear no part in the prayer. This distinction holds good, wherever what calls itself prayer deserves the name. We know very well that exhortation, rebuke, and expostulation are sometimes addressed to the Deity, while they are designed for the congregation ; but this is an irreverent perversion and abuse, rather than a legitimate mode of worship. When properly conducted, public prayer at the most recognizes and expresses the degree of devout feeling already existing in the assembly ; and its duly calm, simple, and solemn utterance, while it tends to intensify, does not strongly tend to diffuse that feeling. But the sermon has for its aim that those who come to scoff may remain to pray, as well as that those whose religious character is already formed may grow in goodness.

Preaching, also, is the only service that is peculiar to public worship. Prayer belongs everywhere, and is always appropriate. " Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs " go up with as rich an unction from the family circle as from church or cathedral. At the same time, the devoting of only one or two hours each week to these duties would be equivalent to their entire neglect. But preaching has no other appropriate place or time than that afforded by the public assembly. There is no need that its occasions be multiplied ; for the hearers may gain in a single half-hour thoughts worth the meditation of a week and the embodiment of a life. Could preaching become daily, or could anything like preaching obtrude itself upon secular occasions, it would lose more in impressiveness than it could gain by its increased copiousness of opportunity and utterance.

Experience confirms the views we have now expressed.

There never has been a time when the offices of devotion have languished in the Church, or have lacked a rich apparatus of holy words and imposing ceremonies. On the other hand, the forms of worship have in numerous instances been the most gorgeous and impressive where the religious sentiment has been the least fervent, penetrating, and pervading. But wherever religion has had a feeble hold on the practical conviction of men, preaching has either gone out of use, or has become jejune, formal, and vapid. In the early days of the Church, preaching, as we have seen, was the chief part of the public service. It declined as the lustre of primitive piety waxed dim. It revived with the dawn of the Reformation. It has preceded and accompanied every great awakening of the religious world. Luther and Melancthon, Wickliffe and Latimer, were the most pungent and powerful of preachers. In more recent times, every movement in the direction of vital Christianity, every marked reform in doctrine and in life, has been heralded by its company of earnest, efficient preachers. The liturgy of the Church of England comprises forms of devotion immeasurably loftier, more adequate, more comprehensive, than could be furnished except by the accumulated piety of ages. Yet it had been used, with all the accessory beauty of holiness, for centuries, and meanwhile the nation had been sinking into spiritual lethargy, indifference, and scepticism, until the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley inaugurated an era of truer faith and more fervent piety. In our own day, the sermon is deemed of the highest importance in precisely those quarters of the Church where there is the greatest amount of zeal, self-denial, and religious activity; while indifference to preaching is very apt to be found in close covenant with those forms of worldliness, selfishness, and fashionable dissipation, which involve no open immorality, but would find themselves condemned by a pulpit true to its mission.

Probably in no portion of Christendom has the sermon been held in so high esteem as in New England,* and certainly nowhere else is there so general a recognition of the truth and

* What we say of New England is equally applicable to other portions of the country, that have derived from New England the controlling elements of their population and character.

need and power of Christianity. We say this with a profound and sad confession of degeneracy from the ancestral type of piety, and of the prevalence in certain quarters of a latitudinarianism which can hardly be discriminated from infidelity. Yet even by those who will not yield to it, Christianity is recognized as a force, and of those who disbelieve it, the greater part have too strong a reverence for it to assume toward it an avowed antagonism; while a larger proportion of the people than in any other district of Protestant Christendom find in the religion of the New Testament truths which they desire to understand, and precepts which they mean to obey. Therefore is it that preaching is here regarded as the prime function of the clerical office, that the ability to preach well is the first desideratum in a pastor, and that in the public estimation the clergy take rank mainly in the ratio of their capacity and success as preachers. Moreover, in all denominations among us, it is the most believing and serious congregations that still regard the sermon as the central object of interest in the public service, and look on with distrust while the substitutes for it which are proposed from time to time gain brief and limited favor.

In accordance with this condition of the public mind, the sermon holds a higher place in our literature than in the literature of any other people. We are by no means vain of American authorship, and have often recognized the justice of our severe Transatlantic critics, while we have censured their malignity of spirit. But our sermons hold the first place in our prose literature, and in this department—in this alone—we are disposed to claim precedence of our contemporaries in the Old World. The best English sermons fall below our best in freedom and breadth of thought, in directness, in fervor, and in adaptation to the general mind and conscience,—while among the most popular English preachers there are those whose windy declamation would find no favor among intelligent American hearers and readers. Dr. Cumming would have here a very restricted reputation, and Spurgeon's coarseness and irreverence would here repel alike the cultivated and the devout, both of which classes are said to be largely represented in his audiences. The sermons of the most distinguished

German divines are rhapsodies, with but a slender substratum of thought, and are immeasurably inferior to their other theological writings. The great living Protestant preachers in France surpass all others in method, in brilliant rhetoric, and in range of illustration and ornament; but their sermons are addressed to the imagination, rather than to the will or the emotional nature, and are better adapted to awaken admiration than to produce conviction. The free church of Scotland alone, whose preachers have been nurtured under the voluntary system, and are prized for the spiritual results consequent on their labors, produces sermons that occupy, with reference to the religious needs of the human heart, the plane on which the American pulpit stands; but the Scotch sermon is apt to be redundant in verbiage, and deficient in point of pure literary taste.

With those who have heard Dr. Walker preach, we hesitate not to say that the first feeling in reading his sermons is disappointment in missing all that they owed to his revered presence and his living voice. With none of the arts of oratory or the conventional attributes of a great orator, he is impressive in his delivery almost beyond precedent. Every look and utterance denotes on his part profound conviction,—a mind thoroughly imbued, identified with the truths he preaches. He speaks not with the glow of one who is setting forth fresh, untried thoughts, but with the calm, subdued fervor of one who is drawing from the depths of long experience, exhibiting the constituent elements of his own inward life, proclaiming truths that lie in his mind as axioms, beyond controversy, above the province of reasoning. There is always a felt void, and perhaps never more than in this very instance, when one whom all trust, love, and honor, and who has been wont to speak to the ear, first addresses the same or like words to the eye alone.

There is yet another disappointment. Dr. Walker's style has seemed to his hearers more copious and fluent than his readers find it. With his slow and measured utterance, we have failed to estimate his severe conciseness; and with the blended dignity and grace of his delivery, we have not known how little he was indebted to rhetorical ornament. But his

diction is not rich. His command of language is feeble as compared with the range and magnitude of the thoughts to which he gives expression. Of the arts of dress by which the old is made new, and the commonplace original, he is wholly innocent. He employs metaphors only when their obviousness and directness make them seem literal, comparisons only when they offer the shortest and easiest route to the mind or heart of his hearer or reader. He has nothing of the kaleidoscopic faculty, by which a thought is presented in successive views, each time with a new cluster of accessory images. What he says he says once for all, in the simplest form in which it can be uttered, and then with a new sentence proceeds to another definite stage in the development of his subject. In every sermon he has a distinct aim, and that an aim always momentous as regards the body of Christian truth or the necessities of those to whom it is addressed. But if in the steps of his demonstration, or in preparing the way for his appeal, there is familiar ground to be passed over, he makes no attempt to hide the triteness, baldness, bareness of his statements, — nay, rather prefers, as it seems to us, to lead the mind or heart of his hearer on from what he admits as of course and of necessity, to what it is of vital importance that he be made to infer, believe, or feel.

But the reader who has sustained this double disappointment is destined to be a third time disappointed, to his joy and gratitude, in the wealth of weighty thought, cogent motive, and profound spiritual wisdom with which this volume is replete. Those who heard these very sermons were not aware how much there was in them, how they would grow on re-perusal, how irresistible they were in argument, how forceful in appeal, how sure and deep in insight, how just and wise in the criticism of human character, how surcharged with the spirit of serene reverence and devotion. They are less productions than revelations of the author's mind and heart, and it is with them as with every manifestation of character, — their contents are not taken in at first sight; they have a reserve which invites and rewards the frequent return and review.

It is among the highest merits of these sermons that they are precisely what they purport to be, — not disquisitions, nor

orations, nor essays, — not such displays of learning or of dialectic skill as would be appropriate and welcome under any other name, — but simply *sermones*, *talks*, in a style adequate to the subject, — talks about religious truth and duty, expressly designed and adapted to enlighten, convince, persuade, — to commend Christianity to loving reverence and implicit obedience. There is no room for inferring any collateral purpose with this. On the other hand, we are often struck with the author's self-denying reticency on subjects lying just outside of his track, on which he would have spoken wisely and well, but not without digression from his directly religious purpose. There is often the clearest indication of an affluent mind in the choice from among all others of the one instance or example which best illustrates the proposition under treatment ; but the preacher gives no hint of the instances or examples that must have been weighed, considered, and rejected, before the right one was chosen. Often, too, the subject is one which could have been mastered only by an extensive survey of details, the trial of successive hypotheses, and the careful discrimination between coincidence and correlation ; yet of all this we see not the process, but only the results, in generalizations so complete and exhaustive as to indicate the thoroughness with which they were made.

We might refer, in verification of these remarks, to the sermon on "The Alleged Infidelity of Great Men." The subject in almost any other hands would branch off into biographical memoranda, the discussion of individual cases of infidelity, and the array over against them of illustrious names identified with Christian faith. Dr. Walker, on the other hand, cites very few names, whether of friend or foe. Some of those few are the very ones which a school-boy would have brought forward, and which one who had before his eyes the fear of being commonplace would have omitted to mention ; others are such as would occur only to a man of extensive and various reading ; but there is not one of them for which, where it stands, we could substitute another equally appropriate name. Then, too, when we have finished the sermon, though we have listened in vain for the roll-call, we find that the great men themselves have heard it, have been quietly marshalled into

their ranks, and have found their respective classes, — workers, thinkers, believers, sceptics, mistaken, mistaking, — and that there is no possible relation in which they can stand to Christianity, which is not specified and accounted for. Very much the same statement might be made as to the sermon entitled “Religion as affected by the Progress of the Physical Sciences.” In this, very little of the ground covered by the title is referred to in detail; but the general principles established by the preacher comprehend the entire circle of relations between science and religion, and we doubt whether any intelligent person who had read the discourse could afterward regard science either as hostile to faith, or as directly and of necessity its ally.

We have referred to two sermons on subjects peculiarly appropriate to a University audience. There are several others in the volume which would have lost something of their aptness, if they had been preached before an ordinary congregation. But by far the larger number of these discourses have nothing either in subject or in treatment which would mark the place where they were delivered. We have such subjects as “The Mediator,” “Conscience,” “Sins of Omission,” “No Hiding-Place for the Wicked,” “The Day of Judgment,” and numerous others which belong to the rudiments of personal religion and practical piety. Nor does the author deem it needful to discuss these themes with any parade of dialectics or of scholarship, but he proceeds in the simple, downright way in which he would urge essential truth or incumbent duty on any class of hearers that understood the power of words. In this we cannot but recognize Dr. Walker’s wisdom and sagacity. One of the great lessons of revealed religion is the equal amenableness of all classes and conditions of men to the law and the judgment of God; and this lesson is blurred and mutilated when the preacher holds back from any the plainest, most direct and home-coming utterances on duty, sin, accountableness, and retribution. Moreover, we are very certain that this style of preaching is nowhere more acceptable than among persons of the highest cultivation, and within the precincts of our literary institutions; while those who fail to edify such audiences are those who, in the consciousness that they are

addressing scholars, forget that they are still more addressing sinners, dying men, invited heirs of immortality.

One striking characteristic of this volume is its conversatism as regards both ethics and theology. Says one of its critics: "Not a word is said, or a thought hinted, that could in any way unsettle the belief, or disturb the feeling, of those who rely most intimately on external authority, or cling most closely to the old symbols of faith." The critic adds: "Certainly, before an audience such as we have described," (a university audience,) "and for the best influence on most Christian congregations, this is right." It is right, we believe, because in accordance with the truth. But does the writer mean to intimate that it is useful to "most Christian congregations," and to young men in college, to inculcate a reliance on false authority, or adherence to false beliefs? Is the old a more wholesome *pabulum* than the true for our religious assemblies? Or are the future scholars of our land to be trained in dogmas which they will outgrow, and learn to despise? And is the head of a university to be praised for teaching what he is too wise to believe? Or, to go further, has the Author of truth and the Creator of man so ill adapted the human mind and soul to the realities of the spiritual universe, that man is more benefited by ignorance than by knowledge of those realities? Nay, does not the admission that the postulates of neology are not fitted for the edification of "most Christian congregations" and the proper development of character, betray a tacit consciousness that those postulates are baseless assumptions? Did we suppose that Dr. Walker admitted the distinction between the esoteric and exoteric, and presented in these discourses other views of truth than those attested by his own consciousness, so far should we be from commending this volume, that there would be no limit to our indignation at such a grave and solemn imposture. But believing, as we do, that our author speaks on these subjects from his own mature conviction and experience, we are profoundly grateful to him for his testimony to the worth, sanctity, and power of verities which have stood the test of the Christian ages, and which are now assailed by no arguments that have not been met and refuted in past centuries, many of them, indeed, by the earli-

est defenders of the faith, some of them by the recorded words of the Saviour and his immediate followers.

In an age when the spasmodic in literature, that which produces "a sensation" in oratory, the radical in morals, the audacious, irreverent, and destructive in theology, finds extensive currency and wins large applause, we feel by no means sure that this volume will "enjoy immediate popularity," or will "do justice to the author's reputation." But if not, it can afford to wait. It will outlast much that will have noisy welcome and diffuse panegyric. It will edify serious minds, confirm the faith of those whose prayer is "Increase my faith," awaken manly religious purpose, form the characters of ingenuous youth, and illustrate the perfect harmony of the highest style of intellect with the repose of pious trust on the testimony of God-inspired Scripture. We rejoice that these Sermons have been given to the world. They are a worthy memorial of the author's unsurpassed ability, skill, and fidelity as a religious teacher, and especially of his fitness for the place he has so honorably filled as the head of an institution inalienably consecrated "to Christ and the Church."

ART. X. — *Speeches at the Annual Banquet of the Lord Mayor of London*, Nov. 9, 1861. National Intelligencer, November 27, 1861.

It may be stated as a result of our examination of the alleged Right of Secession, that the people of the several States composing the United States, under the Constitution, — whether that instrument be regarded as an organic law, or as a compact, — form an entire Nation, for the purposes for which they are thus united; while under their State organizations they exercise many powers of sovereignty, of a political and municipal character, some of which are subordinate to the powers of the General government, and others independent of that government because they do not fall within the scope of the purposes for which it was organized, and all "powers not